School District Review Report

District Name:	Mission
District Number:	75
Superintendent:	Nancy Wells
Date of Visit:	March 23 – 26, 2003
Team Chair:	Bendina Miller, Superintendent, School District No. 6 (Rocky Mountain)
Team Members:	Judy Arnold, Ministry of Education Bonnie Chappell, Director of School Services, School District No. 57 (Prince George) Cathy Elliott, Manager, Program Development, BCPVPA Christine Foster, Principal, School District No. 82 (Coast Mountain) Joyce Gram, Parent, School District No. 36 (Surrey) Ray Myrtle, Teacher, School District No. 41 (Burnaby)

Context

Mission is a district of 7300 K-12 students in 21 schools. It is a diverse community with strong support for public education. The district focuses on sustaining a respectful, principle centered culture.

The Mission School District Review is one of twenty school district reviews being undertaken in the year 2002-2003.

The purpose of the District Review is to provide feedback and recommendations to the district, the Ministry of Education, and the public regarding the school district's work in improving student achievement by;

- reviewing district and school achievement data
- reviewing the district Accountability Contract and school plans to improve student achievement
- making recommendations to the Board and the Minister about improving student achievement; and
- identifying promising practices that will assist other districts and schools in their efforts to improve student achievement.

Summary of Process

Review Team Activities:

- On the first morning of the Review, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Board, senior district staff, trustees and representatives of stakeholder groups presented an overview of the district which included in-depth information in regard to the ten points of inquiry.
- During the remainder of the visit members of the District Review Team met at 14 of 21 district schools for approximately two hours each. At the schools the team members met with teachers, administrators, members of the PAC, DPAC and School Planning

Councils. In addition some visits included a CUPE representative and in one case, a student.

School Visits included:
Stave Falls, Christine Morrison Elementary, Fraserview Elementary, Cherry Hill Elementary, Edwin S. Richards Elementary, Hillside Elementary, Heritage Park Secondary, Mission Secondary, Deroche Elementary, Durieu Elementary, Dewdney Elementary, Ferndale Elementary, Home Learners Program and Riverside.

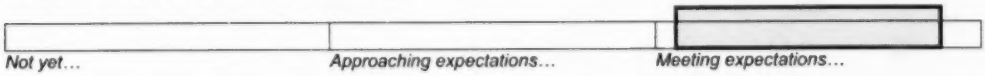
The team was appreciative of the welcome and the comprehensive data it received at each visit.

The team met with Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent and the Vice-Chair of the board to consider additional information regarding the District Plan.

At the conclusion of its visit the District Review Team presented the report to a wide group of representatives of partner groups including the Mayor, R.C.M.P., DPAC, district and school staff.

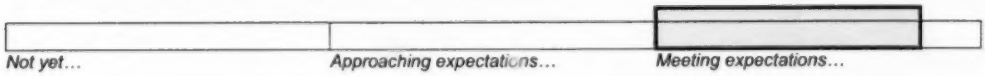
Observations in Key Areas - Focus on Student Achievement

1. Goals:
   Improving districts have a strong instructional focus. This focus is made visible in clear goals for improving student learning.



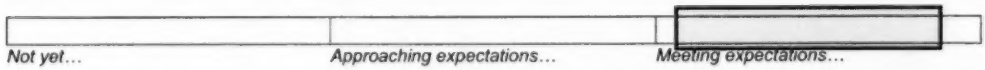
   Thoughtful goals based on evidence that is clearly linked to student learning are in place.

2. *Rationale:*
   Improving districts have a thorough and connected set of reasons based on evidence for the selection of their student achievement goals.



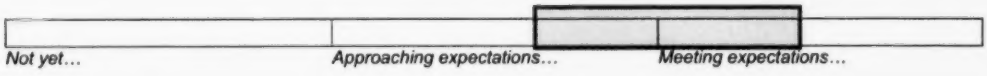
   There is evidence of well thought out reasons based on an understanding of student achievement data and community expectations.

3. *Data:*
   Improving districts are actively considering at least three sources of evidence including classroom, school and district / provincial data. The analysis of this evidence has informed the selection of the district goals.



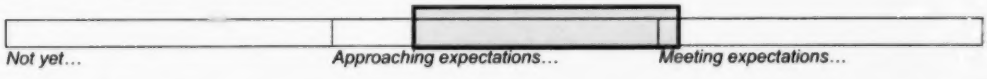
   Classroom, school, and district /provincial data sources will provide evidence of progress.

4. *Strategies:*
Improving districts have a well-organized, focused improvement plan in place. The strategies selected to achieve the goals are an intelligent blend of research, best practice, and innovative thinking.



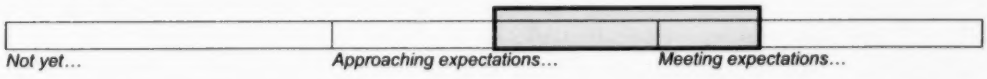
While there is evidence of strategies that are practical and research based, some are not well connected or strongly linked with professional development.

5. *Structures:*
Improving districts have aligned structures – resources, time, organizations – to get the results they want. This includes effectively differentiating resources in the areas of highest need for improvement.



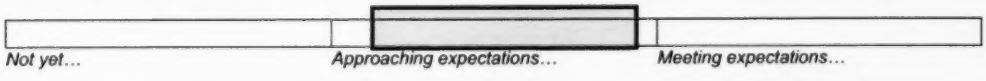
Structural changes have been initiated and some adjustment in support of district goals was evident.

6. *Results:*
Improving districts get improved student learning results – at the classroom, school and district levels.



Performance targets and trend data are being established with encouraging signs of progress.

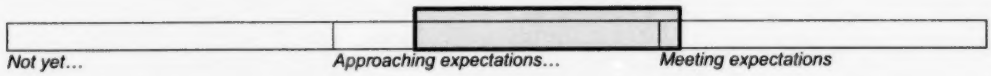
7. *Communication:*
Improving districts communicate and make public their improvement goals and the progress being made.



The district communicates and makes public improvement goals and the progress being made.

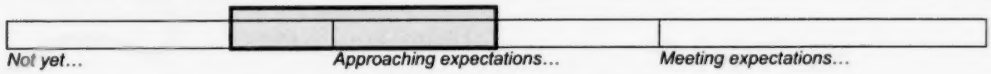
8. *Teamwork*:

Improving districts have a dynamic and interactive strategy for connecting school and district goals. School uniqueness and school district directions are both valued.



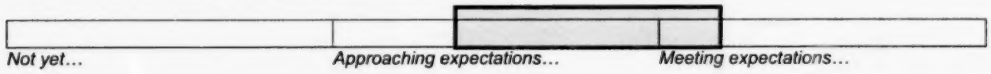
School goals inform the district direction and district goals inform schools' directions with evidence of strategies linking the two.

9. *Teamwork*:
Improving districts work as a team with parents, including specific groups of parents, on improving student learning.



There is evidence of commitment and necessary elements to involve parents in improvement of student learning.

10. *Leadership / Teamwork:*
Improving districts are led by district leaders with a clear vision for and commitment to school improvement and improving student achievement. Principals, vice principals, teacher, parent and student leadership is encouraged and systematically developed – with a focus on improving student learning.



While there is ample evidence of shared leadership in both district and schools, community focus around student achievement is in the beginning stages.

Strengths

The District Review Team noted the following strengths;

- a strong culture of care and support for students
- a strong senior leadership team modeling current leadership practice
- the development of professional learning communities through initiatives such as the Network of Performance Based Schools
- widespread use of Performance Standards for assessment
- support for teachers and school based administrators to adopt leadership roles
- important, recent initiatives to involve the community in decision making
- involvement and support of the Aboriginal Education Committee to increase student achievement
- a strong connection and consultation with the business community and civic leaders in support of alternative pathways for all students

Promising Practices

The District Review Team observed many promising practices in the district and encourages all partners to become familiar with and share these practices.

School and classroom initiatives

- STARS – Socially Terrific Acts of Responsible Students based on the social responsibility performance standards
- Early intervention support strategies including:
  - Books for Breakfast
  - Food survey and eyesight screening for grade 8 students
  - Homework Backpacks
- Social Studies 8 Ministry-approved local Aboriginal Education focused curriculum
- fully integrated use of Performance Standards
- commitment to and active involvement in the Network of Performance Based Schools
- grad exit survey
- close relationship with University – sharing of expertise
- Shadow Day – parents follow their child
- parallel French Immersion program / materials based on performance standards
- emphasis on boys' reading through selection / purchase of high interest non-fiction
- scholarship team retreat with students
- extensive use of classroom assessment strategies

Alternative Pathways

- reclaiming youth who have left the system
- training youth for immediate employment in the community
- alternative pathway initiatives leading to student success including:
  - trades, training and technology program
  - home learners' program
  - alternative school

Leadership

- analytical process used in decision making
- many opportunities for student leadership at all levels
- district leadership provided by school-based administrators
- parent forums
- instructional team leaders at secondary

Aboriginal Education

- Secondary Aboriginal Student Survey
- Aboriginal Community Survey
- Aboriginal Education community newsletter to parents and students about community events and opportunities in schools and the community

Recommendations

We respectfully suggest the district examine:

- Consolidation of a shared purpose for district and schools for improvement of student achievement with a focus on results
- Review of district support structures for providing necessary district level staff resources to assist schools in adopting a shared focus for student improvement
- Methods of allocating time and resources for teachers to plan with each other, to observe each other and to review data from their students' learning.

- Ways to promote growth in assessment practices from assessing ***of*** learning to assessing ***for*** learning.
- Strategies for more meaningful parent involvement by;
    - creating opportunities for parent education and shared understanding of education issues
    - building a dynamic, interactive relationship that engages the parent community for the benefit of students.
- Expansion of initiatives directed at challenging more able students

Follow Up (to be determined by Ministry of Education)

Required follow up with specific time frame may take the form of:

- Ministry phone call
- Deputy Minister visit
- District report to the Ministry
- Review of the next year's district contract
- Special Advisor appointment